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**Fifth Committee**

**Summary record of the 31st meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 9 November 1999, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Ms. Wensley ..... (Australia)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

## Contents

Agenda item 127: Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (*continued*)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

**Agenda item 127: Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services** (*continued*) (A/54/393)

1. **Mr. Paschke** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services) said that, as the delegation of Guyana had requested on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, he had distributed a written summary of his answers to the questions raised during previous meetings concerning the annual report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/54/393).

2. In response to the comments of some delegations concerning the press conference he had given on 25 October to introduce the annual report of the Office, he wished to emphasize that the remarks attributed to him by some media reports, in particular that of the United Nations Foundation UN Wire, were a misrepresentation of his statements. While he deplored the reluctance of a number of Member States to support the work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), he had never intimated that those States were opposed to reform or that they routinely ignored the Office's suggestions. He could state categorically that he had never singled out any Member State and would request delegations not to hold him responsible for incorrect media reports.

3. The Group of 77 and China had apparently taken offence at some remarks contained in the preface to the report. He had always assumed that the independence the Member States had conferred on him as the person responsible for the Office authorized a certain candour, in accordance with his mandate, as set forth in circular ST/SGB/273.

4. In response to the request of the representative of Egypt, the Investigations Section of OIOS would conduct an investigation of the press report of 28 October posted on the United Nations Foundation web site, but in all likelihood it would not be possible to identify the source of the "leak".

5. **Mr. Barnwell** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that he had never attributed to Mr. Paschke the remarks in question, but he found it regrettable that five member countries of the Group of 77 had been criticized by name. The United Nations Foundation should demonstrate greater professionalism. The Group of 77 asked the Secretary-General to shed light on the unfortunate episode. He would also like further clarification of the remarks contained in the preface to the annual report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (A/54/393) to the effect that Member States were engaging in "micromanagement".

6. **Mr. Demir** (Turkey) said that his delegation attached the highest priority to the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the Organization; OIOS had played a very important role in that regard. Recalling the circumstances in which the General Assembly had created OIOS in 1994, he said it was satisfying to note that, five years later, the Office had contributed greatly to the establishment of a new style of management in the Organization. The rate of implementation of the Office's recommendations continued to increase, reaching a level of 85 per cent in some areas; that showed that programme managers were taking the Office's suggestions seriously. The cost savings OIOS had made possible were another cause for satisfaction.

7. His delegation felt that the independence of the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services was the cornerstone of the system, and it noted with satisfaction that that independence had never been compromised. He had read with great interest the summing up presented in the preface by the Under-Secretary-General. His delegation agreed that further improvement was necessary in the areas of accountability, delegation of authority and human resources management.

8. He wished the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, whose tour of duty was about to end, all success in his future activities.

9. **Ms. Silot Bravo** (Cuba) said that her delegation fully supported the statements made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. While she was generally satisfied with the quality of the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, she, too, was concerned about the preface to the report, which did not sufficiently elucidate the interface between the activities of OIOS and those of the Organization as a whole and thus did not allow for a comparison between the results obtained and the goals set by the General Assembly when OIOS has been created. Instead of criticizing Member States for engaging in micromanagement, it would have been

preferable to mention in the preface the need for a better definition of the respective roles of the Member States and the Office. Her delegation was also disturbed to read that it would be desirable to reduce the number of mandates and to redefine the priorities of the Organization; she felt that the comment had no place in the preface.

10. With respect to the body of the report, she was pleased to learn of the increase in the implementation rate of the Office's recommendations, but would have liked some information on the implementation of certain recommendations that were not strictly internal in nature and could have an impact on activities mandated by the deliberative bodies. Moreover, while it was satisfying to learn that internal oversight mechanisms in operational funds and programmes had been strengthened, further information would have been welcome concerning deliberations on the role of OIOS in that regard, in the light of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B.

11. With regard to cost savings, her delegation applauded the achievements in that regard but believed that the savings should be evaluated in the light of the goals for which OIOS had been created. It would be unacceptable if, on the pretext of cost-cutting, OIOS were to become involved in determining the amount of budget allocations.

12. Her delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Pakistan with regard to paragraph 29 of the report.

13. With respect to investigation, she welcomed the fact that the report mentioned cases in which the Office had recommended that officials should be cleared. With regard to monitoring, however, the report prejudged the outcome of the ongoing discussions on budgetary questions between the Fifth Committee and the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC). Finally, with respect to electoral assistance, her delegation, too, was critical of the fact that the report touched on questions of a political nature that went beyond the scope of the Office's mandate.

14. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan) referred to the recommendation in paragraph 29 of the annual report of OIOS to the effect that the amount of $13 million owed to the United Nations Observer Mission in Angola (MONUA) should be recovered from the Angolan Government or, failing recovery, should be offset against any claims subsequently presented by that Government. His delegation considered that that recommendation was in no way comparable to General Assembly resolution 51/12. In any event, it asked once again which financial regulation or rule justified such a recommendation, which could have far-reaching implications.

15. The remarks of the Under-Secretary-General regarding the unfounded assertion in paragraph 22 of the report were not convincing and his delegation regretted that the information it had requested concerning the procedure for the recruitment of police officers had not been provided by the Secretariat.

16. It was not correct to state that the Office's recommendations concerning the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda had been upheld. His delegation had requested general information regarding the procedures for the implementation of the Office's recommendations. It hoped that that information would be provided to the Fifth Committee.

17. Concerning the preface to the report, his delegation reiterated its request that Mr. Paschke should give specific examples of the "overly critical attitude" of Member States that had resulted in "micromanagement by the legislative organs". Likewise, it considered that the remarks concerning the growing number of mandates and the need to redefine the Organization's priorities clearly exceeded the Office's mandate and required clarification. As for the question as to whether the savings achieved as a result of the Office's recommendations were reflected in the budget performance reports, the Under-Secretary-General should have been able to respond to it himself, instead of referring it to the Controller.

18. His delegation noted that the Office would conduct an investigation into the article that had appeared on the web site of the United Nations Foundation. Like the Group of 77 and China, it was awaiting official clarification from the Secretary-General regarding that incident. Nevertheless, it wished to reaffirm its support for the activities undertaken by OIOS in accordance with the regulations and rules of the United Nations and the decisions of the General Assembly.

19. **Ms. Powles** (New Zealand) said that her delegation supported without reservation the statement made by the representative of Turkey and thanked Mr. Paschke for the professional skill and dedication with

which he had worked to strengthen the efficiency of the United Nations.

20. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) associated himself with previous speakers who had paid tribute to the professionalism of the Under-Secretary-General. He expressed certain reservations, however, about the personalized management style adopted by Mr. Paschke and regretted that there had been problems of communication with the Fifth Committee. His delegation considered that Mr. Paschke was ultimately responsible for the difficult situation that had arisen as a result of his press conference and requested that the investigation into the "leaks" should be conducted as quickly as possible. Mr. Paschke noted the reluctance of some Member States to support the work of OIOS. Yet the General Assembly had taken decisions and measures, based on a broad consensus, to give effect to a very large number of the Office's reports. Moreover, 80 per cent of the Office's recommendations had been implemented. The Under-Secretary-General stated that he was authorized by a circular to comment on his activities, but, although he enjoyed operational independence, he must refrain from making "subjective" remarks which threatened to undermine relations between Member States and the Secretariat.

21. **Mr. Orr** (Canada) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of New Zealand and commended the Under-Secretary-General's unremitting efforts and the high quality of his work.

22. **Mr. Lähdesmäki** (Finland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, reiterated the importance that the European Union attached to the strengthening of international oversight in the United Nations system. The European Union endorsed the statements made by the representatives of New Zealand and Turkey and paid tribute to the Under-Secretary-General and his team, who had built a solid foundation for the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

23. **Mr. Paschke** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services) thanked all the speakers and said that the Fifth Committee's lively discussions had been extremely helpful and stimulating for OIOS. He had always endeavoured to give detailed responses to all the questions posed to him, and he assured the representative of Pakistan that his comments would be taken duly into account, including in the informal consultations. The clarifications requested by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China would be provided by the Secretariat. He emphasized that, if there had been communication problems, he could not be held solely responsible. He concluded by expressing the wish that excellent relations would be established between the Fifth Committee and his successor.

24. **The Chairman** thanked Mr. Paschke on behalf of all the members of the Fifth Committee. She suggested that the general debate on the item should be concluded and that the matter should be referred to informal consultations.

25. *It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 11 a.m.*